Flights of the Wright Brothers

General Overview

On December 17, 1903, Orville and Wilbur Wright made the first machine-powered flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. With Orville aboard, the flight lasted about 12 seconds. The first flight covered 100 feet. The brothers made 3 other flights that day with the final one lasting 59 seconds and covering 852 feet. The machine the Wright brothers used was powered by a 12-horse power motor and 2 propellers that they designed.

Over the next few years the Wrights built stronger machines that flew farther and were more reliable.

Lesson Objectives

Students should be able to:

Discuss the importance of the first flight
Discuss how inventors can work together to their mutual benefit
Critically discuss the contents of a photograph
Discuss how media coverage of events has changed through time
Discuss the importance of saving primary documents

Preparation

Students should study the materials provided.
Students should visit the State Archives of North Carolina, Educational Resources website at http://www.archives.ncdcr.gov/educationalresources/wrightbrothers.html

Activities

➢After studying the photograph of the Wright brothers' flight, discuss some of the problems they faced. The following questions may stimulate discussion.

What dangers did they face?
What things did they have to consider when they built the airplane?
Why was the terrain at Kitty Hawk good for their experiment?
If an experiment such as that depicted in the photograph were conducted today, how do you think the photograph might differ?

➢Read the copy of the original newspaper article. The following questions should start discussion.

For an event that we think of as so important, the newspaper article is not a large one. Why do you think that is?
Why do you think the Wrights chose Kitty Hawk as a place to experiment with manned flight?
If such an experiment were to take place today, how do you think it might be treated differently in the newspaper?

➢Read the letter from Orville Wright to Reginald Fessenden, who was another important inventor of the period. It is obvious from the letter that both Fessenden and the Wrights were working on similar or complementary projects.

In the letter Wright expresses concern about the weight of the motor. Why would weight be an important issue to him?
Do you think inventors frequently write to each other? Why or why not?
Why is it important that such a letter be saved and preserved?

Extension and Enrichment

After doing some additional research:

Make a scale model of the Wright brothers' plane used at Kitty Hawk.
Write a logbook of the Kitty Hawk experiments done by the Wrights.
Create a video documentary of the first flight.
Check other newspaper accounts of the flight. Compare their similarities and differences.

Sources

Dictionary of North Carolina Biography

Reginald A. Fessenden Papers, PC 1140, State Archives of North Carolina
The Morning Post (Raleigh, NC), December 19, 1903